

# Ethnic Minority Voices in Tenant Engagement Case Study





# Case Study

## Strengthening Trust Through Culturally Responsive Engagement with Somali Residents

### Overview

This case study explores how a Somali Community Fun Day evolved into a culturally sensitive engagement platform, enabling residents to access housing support, health services, and safeguarding pathways in a trusted environment.

Through a blend of community celebration and Housing service presence, the event organised by Housing Tenancy team created an accessible space that led to improved engagement, new disclosures of domestic abuse, and strengthened trust between residents and services.

- **Organisation/Community:** Islington Council
- **Team:** Housing Tenancy
- **Community:** Somali Community
- **Location:** Islington, North London
- **Date/Duration:** 18th May 2024 with follow on case work June – Sept 2024)

### Background and Context

The Somali community in Islington is a significant, well-established population, largely comprising refugees who arrived from the 1990s onward, with a strong presence in the borough's school-aged demographics. The Somali community is one of the most significant communities on the Andover Estate but has historically disengaged with Housing services with lower participation in formal housing engagement and limited trust in statutory services.



The event was held to:

- Rebuild trust
- Improve communication channels
- Provide access to local support services
- Create culturally familiar, non judgemental spaces

Residents raised serious and wide ranging issues including: overcrowding, long term temporary accommodation, domestic violence, safeguarding concerns, mobility needs, and youth support. These issues emerged both in open discussions and in private conversations supported by interpreters.

In the aftermath of the tragic community events, the need for solidarity, cultural sensitivity and visibility from services was particularly acute.

## Objectives

- Increase trust and engagement with Somali residents through culturally sensitive approaches.
- Provide direct access to housing, health and safeguarding services.
- Strengthen service visibility and build informal relationships.
- Foster a sense of togetherness and solidarity in response to tragedy.



## Approach and activities

Based on the T.A.B.L.E Principles:

### T Tailored Training

- Staff prepared for the event with a focus on cultural awareness. Food, atmosphere, and informal conversation were intentionally used to remove barriers.

### A Actively Engaging Communities

- Event attended by over 300 Somali residents, making it one of the most successful culturally targeted engagements held on the estate.
- Services were taken to the community rather than expecting residents to attend formal settings.



### B Bringing Everyone Into the Conversation

- Housing, repairs, downsizing, and local community services were all represented.
- A Doctor was on site offering advice on vaccinations and general health needs.
- Community Translators were key in ensuring everyone could access the information and support provided by different services which enabled those normally excluded from engagement to take part meaningfully.

### L Listening to Voices

- Residents shared deeply personal experiences, including overcrowding, long term temporary accommodation challenges, and domestic abuse. The informal environment encouraged openness and built immediate rapport.

### E Ethnic Minorities

- The approach fully recognised that “one size fits all” methods do not work for Somali communities. Culturally familiar food, tone, and environment helped residents feel safe and respected.



## Outcomes and impact

### Quantitative Outcomes:

- 300+ attendees, representing one of the strongest engagement turnouts from the Somali community.
- Multiple residents accessed direct housing advice, safeguarding support and health consultations.

### Qualitative Impact:

- The community expressed **deep appreciation**, requesting that similar events be held regularly.
- A **new communication channel** was opened between residents and services.
- The event became a **trusted gateway** for vulnerable residents to disclose risk safely.

## Lessons learned case study

### Background

A survivor attended the event with significant concerns about overcrowding in a one bedroom flat with two children. During the engagement, she disclosed a history of domestic abuse.

### Escalation & Response (June – September 2024):

- ✓ Case allocated to a Principal Officer (June).
- ✓ Introduction meeting held with the survivor, Principal Officer, and Domestic Violence & Abuse Team Leader.
- ✓ Risk Assessment process initiated and completed.
- ✓ Multi agency working with Children's Social Care and specialist partners.
- ✓ Home Shelter referral completed.

- ✓ Family Court ruling awarded **no child contact**.
- ✓ Housing Needs initiated points award process
- ✓ Survivor felt **safer, supported, and emotionally stabilised**, beginning recovery while awaiting appropriate rehousing.

### Why This Matters

The case demonstrates the **critical safeguarding role** community engagement can play when delivered in culturally familiar, low pressure settings. Without this event, the resident may not have disclosed risk or accessed life saving support.

## Lessons learned

- ✓ Community-based events can create safe spaces for disclosure not possible in formal offices.
- ✓ The presence of interpreters and culturally familiar settings dramatically increases trust and openness.
- ✓ Multi-agency collaboration is crucial for supporting high-risk cases identified at community events.
- ✓ Engagement with ethnically diverse communities must be ongoing, not one-off.
- ✓ Events delivered in partnership with trusted community figures have exponentially higher impact.

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## Next steps / sustainability

- Strengthen pathways from informal engagement into structured support
- Continue refining culturally responsive methods (translators, informal seating, family friendly spaces, events in trusted community spaces).
- Support tenant groups to be involved in future engagement.

## Evidence and data sources

- Attendance figures (300+), service engagement counts and qualitative community feedback from the event.
- Survivor case records (HRM completion, safeguarding involvement, multi-agency collaboration).



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